Editorial

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In July 2009, the Cambridge Victorian Studies Group hosted the joint conference of the North American Victorian Studies Association and the British Association for Victorian Studies, whose theme was 'Past versus Present'. Not surprisingly, papers on William Morris abounded. The conference showcased the wide range of approaches and topics – from art history to anthropology, from print culture to politics – which students of Morris might take up. A special panel on 'Morris Past, Present, and Future', chaired by Peter Stansky, featured Caroline Arscott on 'William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones: The Unity of Matter', and Florence Boos on 'The Defence of Guenevere: Morris's Eternally Recurrent "Pasts"', a revised version of which appears here. Other papers included Elizabeth Carolyn Miller's 'William Morris's Utopian Print and the Politics of the Future', Chris Hokanson's 'Butler, Morris and Wells: Cultural Reproduction and Transference of Memory in the Victorian Age', Caroline Sumpter's 'Barbarian Futures: Imagining Moral and Social Evolution in Late Nineteenth-Century Predictive Writing', and Ruth Kinna's 'Morris: Time and Utopia', the basis of the penultimate article in this issue.

Although it was not possible to reprint all of the conference papers, the two included here, in conjunction with Phillippa Bennett's 'Riot, Romance and Revolution: William Morris and the Art of War', and my own 'William Morris: The Myth of the Fall', address, from various vantages, the interconnected themes of violence, history, and the means of social transformation. Whether one focuses on Morris's early poetry or his late activism, or asks of his work literary, political, or philosophical questions, one cannot avoid the issue of conflict in history. Armed conflict – under the Roman Empire, in medieval France, in the streets of contemporary London, or the revolutionary future – is ubiquitous, and its role as driver of historical change is as vital to Morris's political theory as it is to his verse and prose romances. Morris was a man of paradoxes, and it is difficult to reconcile his 'pacifism' and professed abhorrence of acts of violence with his narrative love of a good fight in the right cause, or his strategic thinking in matters of urban warfare. Florence Boos, who has written about these themes before ('Dystopian Violence: William Morris and the Nineteenth-Century Peace Movement', *Jour-*

nal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies, Spring 2005), reads the *Defence* poems in light of this paradox, stressing Morris's gift for 'identification' and its evolution into the historical 'understanding' of his later years. Despite the endemic violence and the 'Hobbesian war of all against all' portrayed in the *Defence*, the volume may be seen as a first attempt at the recreation of 'living cultural memory' which preoccupied Morris for the rest of his life.

Warfare and conflict remained central tropes in the romances (past and future) of the 1880s and 90s, though by this time, as Phillippa Bennett demonstrates, they were indissolubly linked with Morris's conception of social revolution. His response to Black Monday and Bloody Sunday, and the battle metaphors of his political lectures, fit perfectly with the violent imagery of much socialist and anarchist rhetoric. Although Morris came to realise that contemporary socialist struggles would not be played out on the battlefield, he continued to long for a complete overthrow of capitalism. The values and ideals of the Communist barbarians were still worth fighting for: contemporary socialists could learn much from past conflicts, and the romances helped him to envision the 'process of social transformation' via battlefield moments of individual self-sacrifice. Mythical warfare enacted the concerns of nineteenth-century politics: violence was a catalyst for social change and the growth of 'revolutionary consciousness'.

The lessons of historical struggles for justice feature just as prominently in Ruth Kinna's exploration of Morris's and his collaborator E. B. Bax's philosophies of history. The cause of fourteenth-century peasant rebels dramatised in *A Dream of John Ball* resembled that of Victorian workers, but though the latter stood at the right historical juncture, a moment ripe for social transformation, they lacked the 'moral courage' of their predecessors – the will to change and the circumstances of historical development were mismatched in both cases. But 'Morris identified socialist ethics with a past hope in a way which suggested continuity in history': unlike Bax, he was neither hostile to utopianism nor sceptical about the knowability of the past. Instead, an understanding of history was essential to securing the coming revolution: past battles provided the model for future action.

DidMorris carry this belief to his grave, or did he eventually moderate his views, accepting 'gas and water socialism', as Phillippa Bennett reminds us, as a 'necessary first stage' on the road to the Great Change? The final article reconsiders the controversial question of Morris's supposed falling away from purist principles during the 1890s. If revolutionary violence was no longer a short-term possibility, what course was social transformation to take? On what other fronts could battles be fought? Having begun with the soldiers of the Hundred Years' War, the issue concludes with the industrial and parliamentary conflicts of the final decade of the nineteenth century. During almost forty years between the youthful Morris's first poetic endeavour and his mature attempts to form a united socialist party much had changed, but his preoccupation with the historical